

The historic value of this system of cooperative watering is well known in northern New Mexico. In fact, when the acequia associations and I agreed to improve this system, our suggestions were resisted by State of New Mexico agencies on the grounds that concrete lining, for example, would alter the historic value of these acequias.

Of course, the state agency did not want to help with the expensive and frequent repairs and annual maintenance. They wanted the subsistence farmers to do this themselves, at their own expense.

Working with Las Nueve Acequias Steering Committee, and their excellent Chairman Wilfred Gutierrez, we are now celebrating a quarter century of overcoming bureaucratic barriers and making real improvements to this vast system of acequias. In the past twenty five years, I have been able to convince my colleagues in the Senate of the value of acequias to the economy and culture of northern New Mexico.

The Congress has been accepting of my proposals. At my urging, the Congress authorized a special program to make the needed physical improvements to acequias, while maintaining the traditional cooperative relationships. The traditional leader of an acequia is the "mayordomo." Mike Martinez, the current mayordomo of the Chicos ditch in Velarde was on hand to christen the latest section of improvements in late April. This event was a milestone that marks a quarter century of a vital partnership with the federal government to keep these acequias operable for the next century.

We are still a couple of years away from completing \$30 million worth of improvements in the Velarde area of New Mexico. Miles of acequias have been greatly improved in the past quarter century. I have been fortunate to have the support of my colleagues for many appropriations over all these years. In gratitude for the consistent support of my colleagues for funding these acequia projects, I would like them to see the attached newspaper article from the Rio Grande Sun, May 6, 1999, by Cynthia Miller, entitled, "After 25 Years, Acequia Project Finally Finished". This article gives us important insights into the value of the acequias to thousands of northern New Mexicans. After a quarter century of improvements, the acequia users and associations can continue to rely on this essential source of water for their lifestyles, and their livelihood.

I ask that this article be printed in the RECORD.

The article follows:

[From the Rio Grande Sun, May 6, 1999]

AFTER 25 YEARS, ACEQUIA PROJECT FINALLY FINISHED

(By Cynthia Miller)

When the Chicos ditch in Velarde was opened April 28 during a ceremony to celebrate the completion of 3000 feet of improvement work, Las Nueve Acequias Steering Committee Chairman Wilfred Gutierrez said he witnessed not only the one ditch's

progress that day, but also the past 25 years of progress on a \$20 million federal project covering nine ditches in the area.

The 3000 feet of concrete piping from a Rio Grande dam up the Chicos marks one of the last stages of the project, Gutierrez said, estimating \$15 million in federal funds has been spent on the project so far.

He said the ditch was christened by acequia mayordomo Mike Martinez and several federal Bureau of Reclamation officials who gathered April 28 to watch as water was released from the newly lined dam for the first time this spring.

The pricey nine-ditch project was initiated in the 1970s, Gutierrez said, when residents of Velarde and surrounding communities rebelled against a \$28 million federal plan to build a canal from the Rio Grande to the Santa Cruz River.

The group successfully stopped the canal from going in and the community's irrigation water supply from going out, he said, and then members got some ideas of their own. "People started asking me why couldn't we use some of that money to rehabilitate our acequias?"

Gutierrez said the farmers in the area were always putting time, money and labor into rebuilding dams and ditches which were washed away by heavy river flows, and fixing spots where muskrats, crawfish and other wildlife dug holes.

Rather than constantly rebuild the acequias just to see them destroyed again, the community members wanted to improve the ditches in a way that would be more permanent and would require less strenuous maintenance efforts, he said.

In 1976 officers from the nine acequias organized into the Las Nueve Acequias Steering Committee and asked Gutierrez to serve as chairman, he said. The group then sought U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici's help in securing Bureau of Reclamation funds for their ditch improvement projects.

Following a Bureau of Reclamation feasibility study around 1980, he said, it was determined that the work would cost about \$20 million. Funds began to come in and plans were made to get started.

The first and most crucial phase was to build new dams, Gutierrez said. "Before that, it was just the old ones that the Spanish and the Indians built. Literally, we were just washing money down the river."

With each heavy rain, he said, the dams just washed away and had to be rebuilt.

Seven new permanent dams were built by Las Nueve Acequias and the Bureau of Reclamation to replace the nine previous dams, he said, and then work was started on lining ditches and creating other structures.

He explained the group is set up so that each ditch has its own officers to make decisions on what work it wants done.

"What's nice about this project is that it's up to the people in the acequias to determine what they want. They have to make the request," he said, adding he has served from the start as an at-large representative of the steering committee.

He represents no individual acequia, he said, and works instead for the good of all nine.

Part of his work has included overcoming obstacles standing in the way of ditch improvements, such as the state Environment Department and the state Game and Fish Department's objections to ditch work, Gutierrez said.

The departments wanted the ditches to remain in their more natural states.

"They wanted the acequias to exist like before, but they didn't realize how expensive it was. And they didn't want to help fix them," he said. "They wanted the acequia groups to be burdened with the expense of keeping the acequias as they had existed."

Gutierrez said he was glad to see the project is nearing its completion.

"When we started it, we thought we could finish it in eight years," he said, "and it's taken 25. . . . We'd like to finish this project in the next two years."

Gutierrez said Las Nueve Acequias has plans to do more work on its ditches this fall.●

AMERICAN HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION AWARD WINNER

● Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, the week of May 9, 1999 is National Hospital Week, when communities across the country celebrate the people that make hospitals the special places they are. This year's theme sums it up nicely: "People Care, Miracles Happen." It recognizes the health care workers, volunteers and other health professionals who are there 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, curing and caring for their neighbors who need them.

An example of this dedication is the Sexual Assault Response of Antelope Valley Hospital in Lancaster, California. The program won the American Hospital Association's prestigious Hospital Award for Volunteer Excellence for 1999, which highlights special contributions of hospital volunteers.

The Sexual Assault Response Service is a team of hospital volunteers that offers specialized assistance to sexual assault victims, families, hospital personnel and law enforcement agencies. To meet the program's high standards, volunteers get more than 60 hours of training.

Responding to a call from any area hospital emergency department, they provide support to victims while helping to solicit histories, preparing evidence collection kits, assisting with medical and legal examinations, and overseeing the completion of state forms. Volunteers work with the district attorney's office throughout the court process and offer one-on-one counseling, a referral service, a lending library and community education.

Mr. President, I want to congratulate Antelope Valley Hospital for this award-winning effort and for their generous contributions to their community.●

IN RECOGNITION OF CFIDS AWARENESS DAY

● Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the efforts of the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Association of Lehigh Valley in fighting Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS), or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS).

Through a tireless effort, the CFS Association of Lehigh Valley is committed to finding a cure for CFIDS, increasing public awareness and providing support for victims of this disease. Public education is an integral part of the association's mission, and the Lehigh Valley organization works to raise awareness through the International CFIDS Awareness Day, which